



**Changes to learning cultures while teaching remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic at a small private Australian university**

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# CHANGES TO **LEARNING CULTURES** WHILE **TEACHING REMOTELY** DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT A SMALL PRIVATE AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY.

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*“The worst thing that could happen is not learning from the crisis we experienced”*

(Rapanta, et al. 2020, p. 941)

## AGENDA

- Introduction
- Emergency remote teaching (ERT) at Bond
- Sociocultural theory of learning
- Research method
- Some findings



# INTRODUCTION

- Primary research question: How did lecturers encourage learning during ERT?
- Ran focus groups and in-depth interviews with 15 lecturers
- ERT is a newly emerging topic
- ERT generated remarkable growth in participants' knowledge and ability to teach, especially online
- Some students came to prefer online learning and teaching while others hated it
- Many participants expressed that they were able to develop engaging, interactive learning environments during ERT in which students became peer teachers and learners and drove their own learning

## ERT AT BOND

- ERT and online learning are not the same (Hodges, et al., 2020).
- Major events began to be cancelled due to COVID-19 starting from March 10 (Handley, 2020), which was the 9<sup>th</sup> week of Bond's 12-week January trimester.
- Lecturers received training from the Office of Learning & Teaching (OLT) on how to use Blackboard Collaborate.
- In week 11, lecturers ran classes through Collaborate from their classrooms.
- All final exams were substituted with alternative assessments.
- Full online learning began in the May trimester.
- All classes were delivered synchronously and recorded.

# SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

**Sociocultural theory** argues that learning is “*a fundamentally social and cultural activity*” and “*cannot be understood apart from its historical, cultural, and institutional contexts*” (Lattuca, 2002, p. 713).

This theory helps us to consider how the context of the pandemic affected teaching and learning at a small private Australian institution.



## RESEARCH METHOD

- Triangulated approach of focus group with three small-group interviews (dyads and triads)
- 15 participants from across three faculties and the *Core* curriculum

# PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Faculty*	Very experienced	Some experience	No experience	No response
M1	HSM	X			
M2	HSM	X			
F1	HSM			X	
F2	HSM			X	
F3	Core			X	
F4	HSM		X		
M3	FSD		X		
M4	FSD	X			
F5	FSD			X	
M5	Core		X		
F6	FSD			X	
F7	FSD			X	
M6	FSD			X	
M7	Core			X	
M8	BBS				X
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>



## RESEARCH METHOD, CONT'D

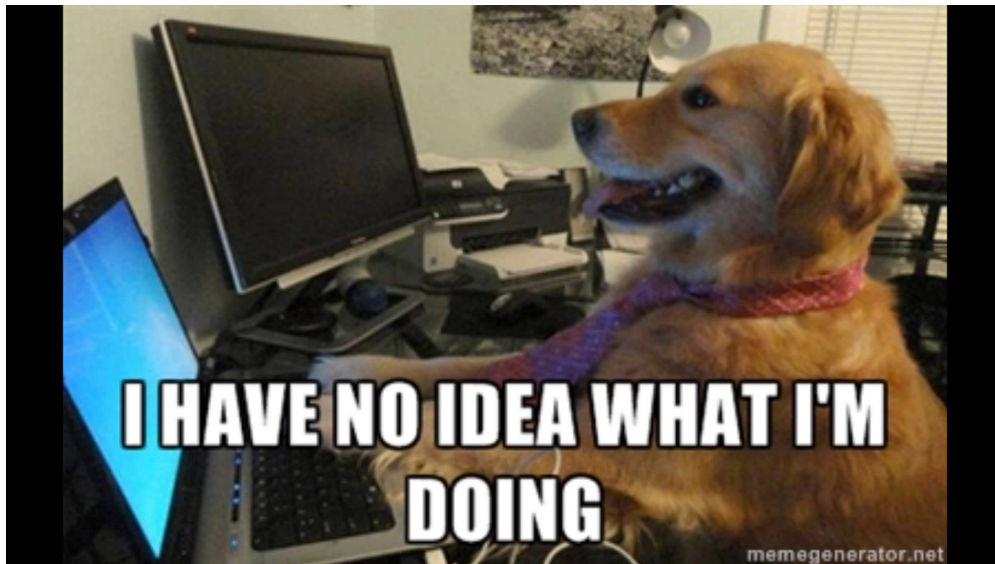
- Semi-structured interviews:

1. **Expectations and planning for ERT**, including participants' fears and concerns, thoughts about student learning, and what makes a productive learning culture
2. **Presentation and self-management**, including how participants made themselves “visible” as people, and what boundaries they set for themselves and their students
3. **Engagement and interaction strategies**, including managing cultural and cognitive diversity
4. **Reflections on ERT**, including what was surprising, and what worked well and what did not

## RESEARCH METHOD, CONT'D

- Three stage process of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994):
  1. Data reduction
  2. Data display, and
  3. Conclusion drawing and verification

## EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: CONFIDENCE



- Nine participants expressed fears and concerns about using the technology and keeping the students engaged
- They negotiated their fears by:
  - Practicing with the technology
  - Finding positive aspects of online teaching
  - Requesting assistance from OLT
  - Getting help from the students

## EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: CONFIDENCE, CONT'D

- *“I felt some anxiety about how I was going to cope with the technology... I wasn’t worried about whether the content would translate online... I [thought] that we would just roll with it. We didn’t have time to adjust” (Participant M7).*
- Participant M6 was “worried” that students would be passive but found something positive in ERT:  
*“On the undergraduate level, I had more participation than in face-to-face [classes] because typically ... one ... would talk a lot and others listen. But, in an online forum, maybe two thirds of the students would be engaged and commenting and show some participation. That was a positive point”*



## EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: STUDENTS HELPED TEACHERS



- Participant F1 asked the students for help, and she returned to OLT for support with online engagement:

*“I had the expectation that they would be young, they would be into this remote, you know, on their devices, this will be okay... No. They were so uncomfortable. And we ended up having some ... good discussions about it when I admitted my stage fright. It was interesting that [they] ... said, ‘We don’t know why we’re so uncomfortable’... It probably wasn’t until about week three that we were able to be ... open and say, ‘Look, how are you ... feeling because I’m not really enjoying this. How can we make it better?’”*

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## **EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT:**

### **CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENT STRESS AND ANXIETY**

- Five participants mentioned concerns about student stress and anxiety during ERT
- Participants dealt with it by:
  - Staying mindful of students' feelings and potential situations
  - Talking about the pandemic during classes
  - Having individual meetings
  - Being lenient on some due dates
  - Frequently checking in
  - Putting greater emphasis on community building
  - Trying to avoid additional stress

## EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: DEALING WITH STUDENT STRESS AND ANXIETY

- Participant F7 thought that the uncertainty of the pandemic was causing her students to feel anxious and stressed so she arranged individual meetings and gave them all an extension:

*“I think they did feel stressed because they didn’t know what was happening. It was a completely uncertain time... I think that the ones who are going to graduate, ... they continued to feel stressed the entire time because they are really worried about the future... So, I would ... have meetings with them via the virtual office ... I gave a blanket extension on one assessment when a few people were ... having issues”.*

## **EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: CONCERNS ABOUT DELIVERING VALUE**

- Two participants expressed concerns about whether their subjects would deliver value during ERT:
  - One thought that if students perceived his class as very current, they would see it as valuable
  - Another sought feedback from her students to ensure that she was delivering value.



## EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: CONCERNS ABOUT DELIVERING VALUE, CONT'D

- *“The things that people are ... paying for are much more about that personal connection to your teacher and ... classmates ... And ... for me, ... making sure that my course could never be confused as ... a stock standard course that had been rolled out year after year, that ... was very much of this year course ... like I updated it this week with current affairs and what you’ve been telling me so that you ... feel like this course’s progression depends on your participation”*

(Participant M2).

## **EXPECTATIONS OF AND PLANNING FOR ERT: PRODUCTIVE LEARNING CULTURES**

- Seven participants provided descriptions for productive learning cultures
- Most noted the need for engagement with the content and interaction among students
- Some participants went further to note that in a productive learning environment, students take control of learning, teach one another and learn together, and create a democracy for safely sharing ideas.

## PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: ORGANISING THE ERT SPACE



1984 IBM Computer "Charlie Chaplin, Hat of the Month Club Inc" TV Commercial

- Physical spaces
- Sharing personal information
- Dress

## PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: HELPING STUDENTS TO FEEL PHYSICALLY CLOSER TO THE LECTURER

- One participant aimed to make students feel physically closer to him by sharing a greater view of himself at home:

*“To show them that ... we’re people, we’d walk around with a video on an iPhone, and we’d stream [it and] ... say ... ‘While we’re having a break, this is what we do’... And we walked into the kitchen and made a ... coffee... And so, we ... got them to almost join in our day... So, we ... tried ... in some ways [to] make it like they were here with us, but likewise, just constantly show[ing] different faces of ourselves”*

## PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: PROTECTING VISIONS OF PRIVATE LIFE

- Several participants discussed how they limited students' views of their homes:

*"I had kind of an office... I was ... marking in my living room. So [with ERT], ... I'm going to have to make my teaching space ... just not have my students ... looking at my family pictures... Those were my things... I ... made my office with ... books at the back, then windows [which] are kind of neutral, but [the view was] kind of the same [that] they would see me in a classroom ... But [also]..., showing some things about yourself in a ... bit more personal [way], having the dogs barking from time to time, so sharing your pet stories or whatever you can't control"* (Participant F5)



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## **PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: DISCLOSING PERSONAL INFORMATION**

- Two participants revealed that they disclosed similar information about themselves during ERT as in face-to-face classes
- Another two participants expressed differences in disclosing information about their families
- One participant discussed how she avoided interacting with students on social media because it would cross professional boundaries
- One last participant said that he disclosed less about himself online than in face-to-face classes

## PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: DISCLOSING PERSONAL INFORMATION, CONT'D

- Participant F7 would not engage with students on social media:

*“When I would have the one-on-one meetings ... they would want to chat ... I ... [went] not too far [in personal discussions] because I ... think it’s good ... to model professional communication ... I don't ever be friends with students on social media, except connected on LinkedIn ... maybe later. But not even that ... except for some students who have got big ... followings because of what they're doing. [I don't] make a comment or like... But I say to them, ‘Okay, I follow you, because it's ... interesting what you're doing’, and I ... talk about what they do in class”*

## PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH STUDENTS

- As most of the participants were teaching online for the first time, knowing what boundaries to set and enforcing them was sometimes tricky.
- Different participants set tighter or looser boundaries
- Five set explicit rules around appearance, behaviour, and communication.
- One set the boundaries with her students
- ... And some students did not fully cooperate with the boundaries



Work + Money, 2020



## PRESENTATION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT: SETTING BOUNDARIES, CONT'D

- *“This [remote class] is just like any other session: you don’t wear a onesie, you don’t eat, speak with your mouth full, you don’t talk with your mouth full”* (Participant F2)
- *“I felt that it [camera use] was a boundary, and I couldn’t get beyond it... And it’s crucial for us, it’s teamwork... Four of five people ... have their cameras on, and one just refuses... There are certain things you can do in a face-to-face environment where you can insist on interaction... In this situation, you can’t”* (Participant M7)
- *“They were eating... [It was] kind of like ... ‘I’m at home. Let’s be comfy and have dinner’. Have dinner at the time when I’m teaching. This is just the way they’re doing it”* (Participant F5)
- *“In the first class ... I ejected someone... They were using the chat feature to make derogatory comments about the intelligence of other people in the room...”* (Participant M5)

## ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTION IN ERT: MANAGING CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

- Six participants discussed ways in which they managed diversity as they defined it:
  - Participant M2 considered diversity in terms of how students prefer to participate
  - Participant M1 discussed challenges with participation from students in China
  - Three participants (M1, F3, and M7) discussed how they brought in information about students' home countries during ERT
  - Participant F7 discussed challenges in getting more reluctant students to participate
  - Participant M5 discussed catering to different learning preferences by providing resources in visual, textual, and audio modes

## ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTION IN ERT: CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE DIVERSITY, CONT'D

- *“I see it as managing different modes of ... participation ... like verbal or written and synchronous and asynchronous... Some students ... will be happy to jump on a ... video and respond ... live... Others will be much more comfortable writing comments on an online forum”* (Participant M2)
- *“On Collaborate, I said, ‘Okay, everyone, hands up [using the icon]. You can put your hand down when you give me an answer’... I did it as soon as that awkward silence was happening, and it was something that I knew ... they could respond to. I would do that because you ... have people who respond all the time, and it's always a challenge to not have to rely on them ... but to give other people a chance ... [and] encourage [them]”* (Participant F7)



## REFLECTIONS ON ERT

- Students disclosed different types of information during ERT  
(Participant F5)
- F7 and M7 enjoyed learning the new technology
- F4 was surprised that she could develop excellent student-teacher relationships
- Four participants said that some students preferred learning online while others hated it
- M2 noted that the pecking order of student achievement and participations was different online
- M2, F1, and M8 expressed that some students achieved exceptionally well during ERT
- M7 and M1 said that their teaching improved during ERT
- M7 and M5 said that they needed to cover less content



## REFLECTIONS ON ERT, CONT'D

- M1 mentioned the loss of informal learning
- M5 said that some students would log on and walk away from their computers
- M5 said that some students resented ERT



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